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Social Participation and Life Satisfaction of Senior Citizens

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SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND LIFE SATISFACTION
OF SENIOR CITIZENS

Judy Kessler and George W. Barger
with the assistance of Nancy C. Wilson

* * *

Urban Studies Center
Wayne Wheeler, Director
University of Nebraska at Omaha
September 1968

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with the aid of funds provided by the City
of Omaha Parks and Recreation Department.

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SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF SENIOR CITIZENS

INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of three surveys relating social participation and life satisfaction as reported by residents of five high-rise apartment buildings in the city of Omaha. These buildings (towers) are available to low-income senior citizens, and are operated under the direction of the Omaha Housing Authority. Recreational facilities and activities are provided by the City of Omaha Parks, Recreation and Public Property Department and it was at their request that this study was undertaken by the Urban Studies Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Primarily, the Parks and Recreation Department was concerned with determining the amount of participation by the residents in activities provided. They were also specifically interested in answers to the following questions:

1. Which of the activities are most popular with residents?
2. Are there additional activities not now available that residents desire?
3. Do residents feel that they should have more voice in choosing what types of activities are offered?
4. How satisfied are residents with their living quarters and way of life in the towers?
5. Would residents be interested in serving as instructors or leaders in the activities at which they excel?
6. Have residents dropped out of any organized activities; and, if so, why?

While these data were being gathered, additional questions were included on the interview schedule in order to obtain some measure of the

general life satisfaction of these elderly people.

There appear to be three major theories of successful aging, the first of which is sometimes called the "activity theory", and is found to be implicit in the writings of problem-oriented gerontologists.¹ In this view, aging consists in being as much like a middle-aged person as possible; that is, in being as active as possible. There seems to be an assumption that if introversion starts to increase with age, something should be done to reverse this tendency. Happiness and successful aging are viewed as being inseparably linked to the maintenance of social contacts and participation in a wealth of recreational pursuits. Contacts with representatives of the Parks and Recreation Department and the Omaha Housing Authority gave the impression that this was their general orientation.

A second and opposite theory is that put forth by Cumming and Henry, the "disengagement theory."² In this theory, aging is seen as withdrawal or disengagement from activity and interaction. Withdrawal from some groups may be more rapid and pronounced than from others. The disengagement theory regards withdrawal as a natural process which the aging person accepts and desires.³ It should not be confused with passive, dependent living. The theory is social psychological in emphasis, the focus of attention being on the manner in which the individual relates to his environment. It is not the structure of the personality or the structure of the society which

¹Elaine Cumming and William E. Henry, Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1961), p. 16.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Richard H. Williams, Clark Tibbitts, Wilma Donahue, eds., Processes of Aging, Vol. I (New York: Atherton Press, 1963), p. 310.

is of utmost interest, but rather the interface between them. This interface is interpersonal behavior. An important assumption in the disengagement theory is that the individual has access to the whole culture, either directly or indirectly, and that he exercises some freedom of choice in selecting his contacts with its various values and institutions.⁴

Finally, there is a theory, that of Havighurst and Neugarten, which defines successful aging in terms of inner feelings of happiness and satisfaction with one's present and past life. In this theory the concept "satisfaction" is said to be composed of a number of dimensions, all of which Havighurst feels can be measured adequately by Kutner's "Morale Scale."⁵ Both Kutner and Srole items have been used in this survey.

Kutner defines morale as "a continuum of responses to life and living problems that reflect the presence or absence of satisfaction, optimism, and expanding life perspectives."⁶ The term morale refers to a mental disposition while the closely allied term adjustment refers to a set of behavior patterns stemming from morale. Thus, a measure of morale also provides a measure of adjustment. Expressed satisfaction and optimism should indicate successful coping with the tasks of aging. Kutner accepted his scale as measuring a unidimensional variable. No assumption of this sort is made in the present survey. The Kutner items ask whether the respondent sees his own life as generally satisfactory or not. As previously noted, Havighurst views this expressed satisfaction as the criterion for successful aging.

⁴Cumming, op. cit., pp. 10-12.

⁵Williams, op. cit., p. 304.

⁶Bernard Kutner, Five Hundred Over Sixty: A Community Survey on Aging (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1956), p. 48.

Kutner's morale scale is composed of seven items which ask whether things are getting worse as the respondent grows older, how much happiness he finds in life, how satisfied he is with his way of life, how many plans he makes for the future, how often he feels that there is no point in living, how much he regrets the chances he missed during his life to do a better job of living, and whether things seem to be better or worse than he thought they would be.

Srole items delve not into the subject's personal happiness but rather ask whether he agrees with some of the major values of the culture. The dominant American values tend to stress the meaningfulness and purposefulness of events. Srole's scale supposedly measures anomia which can be defined in various ways. Srole calls anomia "self to others alienation."⁷ MacIver refers to anomie as "the breakdown of the individual's sense of attachment to society."⁸

According to Srole the components of anomia or alienation are:

1. The person's feeling that community leaders are not interested in his needs. He perceives a break in the interdependent bond within the social system between leaders and their constituents. The item which taps this component is: "There's little use in writing to public officials because often they aren't interested in the problems of the average man."
2. Perception by the individual that the social system is unpredictable and without order. Under these conditions he feels that he can do very little in a positive fashion to realize his life

⁷Leo Srole, "Social Integration and Certain Corollaries: An Exploratory Study," American Sociological Review, XXI, 1956, p. 711.

⁸Ibid., p. 712.

goals. The statement is: "Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself."

3. Belief that the individual is retrogressing from goals already attained. This item says: "In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better."
4. A sense of the meaninglessness of life which reflects a loss of internalized social values and norms. "It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future."
5. The feeling that the framework of personal relationships is no longer supportive or predictable. "These days a person doesn't really know whom he can count on."⁹

In addition to the Kutner and Srole items, other questions, some of which were taken from interview schedules used in the Kansas City Study of Adult Life, were included in this survey in an effort to substantiate one or more of the major theories of successful aging previously described. As Havighurst points out, it is not possible to draw distinct lines between these theories since life satisfaction will be positively related to activity for some people and to disengagement for others, depending on the margin of social and individual choice between the two.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., pp. 712-713.

¹⁰Williams, op. cit., pp. 310-311.

METHOD

Data were gathered during the summer of 1968 from residents of five high-rise, low-rent apartment buildings operated by the Omaha Public Housing Authority. The total number of residents in the buildings was 702. These occupants were people who were at least 62 years of age (with few exceptions) and whose total income fell below a specified level.

An orally administered interview schedule was utilized to gather the data. A letter of introduction and explanation preceded the interviews. Three pre-tests were conducted, and as a result, seven changes were made in the interview schedule. Interviewing was done by two graduate students in sociology over a period of five weeks. The possibility of interview contamination due to communication between respondents and potential respondents was recognized, but impossible to control with such a limited number of interviewers. Interviewers did, however, make an oral request of respondents not to discuss questions with other residents of the buildings. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes.

Subjects were randomly chosen from lists of apartments and residents provided by the Omaha Housing Authority. A 20% sample was chosen from each of the five buildings (towers). The number of persons originally chosen to be interviewed from each tower was:

| | |
|------------------|-----------|
| Burt Tower | 31 |
| Kay Jay Tower | 29 |
| Park Tower North | 26 |
| Park Tower South | 30 |
| Evans Tower | <u>25</u> |
| Total | 141 |

Six or seven additional names were selected from each tower at the same time in order to provide substitutions for subjects in the sample who could not be interviewed.

The original sample included 141 subjects. There were 18 refusals and 5 people with whom contact could not be arranged during the span of time the interviewing was done. One hundred and eighteen subjects were interviewed. One of these respondents refused to complete the interview after it was begun. Twenty-one substitutes were subsequently contacted by letter to increase the sample size. Of these, 17 interviews were completed, 3 people could not be contacted, and there was 1 refusal. One hundred and thirty-five interviews were completed. This was slightly in excess of a 19% sample.

A failure rate calculated on the 162 people in the total sample was 16.4%. The refusal rate for the entire sample was 11.6%, and 4.8% could not be contacted. Several attempts were made to contact the subjects at home either in person or by phone. Those who refused to speak with the interviewer were not contacted again following their initial refusal. Refusals were somewhat concentrated in two of the towers. Only one tower had no refusals at all. Table I summarizes the foregoing.

TABLE I
Percent of Interviews Completed
and Uncompleted

| <u>Building</u> | <u>Completed Interviews</u> | <u>Uncompleted Interviews</u> | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| | | <u>Unable to contact</u> | <u>Refused</u> |
| Burt Tower | 17.3% | .6% | 4.9% |
| Kay Jay Tower | 16.7 | 1.8 | 3.7 |
| Park Tower North | 16.0 | .6 | 1.8 |
| Park Tower South | 18.5 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Evans Tower | 14.8 | .6 | 0 |
| TOTAL* | 83.3 | 4.8 | 11.6 |

*The total does not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The interview schedule itself was composed of both closed and open-ended questions, some of which were duplications of questions asked in the first in this series of surveys. This was done to provide some basis for comparability between the two surveys.

FINDINGS

Sample Characteristics

Of the 135 respondents, 36 were men and 99 were women. There were 125 white subjects. All ten non-white respondents lived in the same apartment building. Fifty-two percent of those interviewed were between the ages of 65 and 74, as is indicated by Table II.

TABLE II

Age of Respondents

| | | |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| Under 60 | 5 | 4% |
| 60-64 | 9 | 7 |
| 65-69 | 38 | 28 |
| 70-74 | 32 | 24 |
| 75-79 | 26 | 19 |
| 80 or above | 23 | 17 |
| No answer | <u>2</u> | <u>1</u> |
| Total | 135 | 100% |

In the total sample, 78% were living alone at the time of the interview while 16% lived with their spouse, 1% with a child, and 4% with another relative. Fewer men than women were living alone however. Sixty-seven percent of the men as compared with 82% of the women resided alone while 33% of the men and only 10% of the women were living with their spouse at the time of the interview. Prior to moving to the high-rise apartment building, 55% of the subjects had lived alone and 25% had lived with their husband or wife.

Apartment living was not totally new to most of the residents interviewed. Sixty-three percent had been living in apartments before they moved to the high-rise buildings. Only 24% had been living in a house just prior to moving into the tower. The remaining 13% had been living in other types of dwellings including trailers and rooming houses. Most (82%) of the residents had been living in these apartment buildings between two and three years. Some persons noted that they enjoy living with others in their age bracket while a few expressed some dissatisfaction with the arrangement noting that "there are so many old people around."

Friends and relatives and the mass media, primarily the newspapers, were the chief sources of information from which respondents had first heard about the high-rise apartments. Thirty-two percent named one of the mass media and 38% said that a friend or relative had suggested checking into the apartments. Lower rent and health were the chief reasons cited in the decisions to move into the towers. Reasonable rent was mentioned by 1/3 of those interviewed and health reasons by 20%. Among the health reasons given were such things as the inability to care for a house and yard any longer and difficulty in climbing stairs. Elevators are available in all five high-rise buildings. Other reasons given for moving into the tower included a desire for independence or to be on one's own, the desire to be with other people, or the fact that their previous place of residence had been torn down or was sub-standard. Table III summarizes these data.

Satisfaction with their living quarters in the tower was expressed by 96% of those questioned. Sixty-five percent stated that they were "very satisfied." No respondent answered that he was "very dissatisfied." Slightly more women (97%) than men (91%) were happy with their current living arrangements. There is of course no way to ascertain whether the subjects may have

TABLE III

Respondents' Reasons for Moving to the High-Rise
Apartment Buildings

| <u>Reason</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Cheaper rent | 44 | 33% |
| Health reasons | 27 | 20 |
| Desire for independence | 7 | 5 |
| Desire to be with others | 4 | 3 |
| Had to move from former residence | 12 | 9 |
| More than one of the above | 21 | 16 |
| Other | 20 | 15 |
| TOTAL | 135 | 101%* |

*Percents do not total 100% due to rounding.

been answering according to their perception of what the interviewer wanted or expected to hear. There could be a latent fear that to display any displeasure would in some way jeopardize their position as residents in the tower. In most cases, the interviewers felt that in response to this particular question the subjects were being straightforward.

While most of those interviewed were happy with their apartments, there were many references to the fact that residents were fearful of leaving the building due to its location. In one of the towers, which is racially mixed, some of the white residents said that they were unhappy about having to locate in that particular building. One resident noted that she never leaves her apartment to mingle in the recreation room or to go out because she would encounter non-white persons in so doing.

Religious affiliation of the respondents was distributed as follows:

| | |
|------------|------|
| Protestant | 66% |
| Jewish | 2 |
| Catholic | 27 |
| None | 5 |
| TOTAL | 100% |

Of these, 65% stated that they do presently attend church services, 38% participating in religious services once a week or more. Thirty-five percent of the subjects do not attend church. This statement was often followed by an explanation that they are now too far from church, that transportation facilities are inadequate, or that their health no longer permits them to participate in church services. A few respondents suggested that it would be desirable to have a minister come to the towers for services on Sunday for those who cannot attend their own churches.

Formal education was rather limited for these subjects. Those having eight or fewer years of school totaled 48%. Some 28% of the sample had completed high school as is shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV
Years of School Completed

| | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| Unknown | 4 | 3% |
| Under 8 years | 26 | 19 |
| 8 years | 39 | 29 |
| 9-11 years | 28 | 21 |
| 12 years | 25 | 18 |
| 13-15 years | 12 | 9 |
| 16 years | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> |
| TOTAL | 135 | 100% |

The amount of schooling probably has considerable bearing on the type of occupation in which these subjects are or were engaged. Only 11 (8%) persons interviewed are presently employed. Sixteen (12%) of the respondents, all women, had never worked outside of the home. Two men and four women had been engaged in professional occupations. (Professional was defined as any occupation which required some college background.) Clerical and sales work was engaged in by 22% of this sample and 39% had been employed in production

and technical work. These categories were rather loosely defined. Clerical and sales work included such occupations as secretary, cashier, and salesman. Production and technical jobs included factory work, carpentry, welding, and the like. Table V shows the type of occupation according to sex.

TABLE V

Previous or Current Occupation
by Sex in Percents

| <u>Sex</u> | <u>Never Employed</u> | <u>Professional</u> | <u>Clerical and Sales</u> | <u>Production and Technical</u> | <u>Other*</u> |
|------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Men | -- | 6 | 8 | 80 | 6 |
| Women | 16 | 4 | 27 | 24 | 28 |

*Other includes such occupations as domestic work and babysitting.

Recreational Activities

Many of the recreational activities in the apartment buildings are sponsored by the City of Omaha Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property. In general, those who take part in the social activities display a great deal of enthusiasm for them. It is to be expected that residents spend less time at these social forms of recreation than at individual leisure time pursuits. Activities such as birthday parties, tours and outings, travelogues and bingo are participated in by more persons than are the more specialized recreational programs such as bowling or ceramics and art classes. Several times respondents noted that materials for the ceramics and art classes often run into considerable expense. Table VI summarizes participation in group activities.

Individual or personal leisure time activities were engaged in by all of the subjects. Due to the fact that the interview schedule did not differentiate between sewing and knitting classes and the individual pursuit of

TABLE VI

Percent of Respondent Participating
in Group Activities

| <u>Activity</u> | <u>Often</u> | <u>Occasionally</u> | <u>Never</u> |
|---|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Monthly birthday parties | 61% | 20% | 18% |
| Fund raising activities (bazaars, bake sales, etc. in the apartment buildings) | 67 | 11 | 22 |
| Tenant meetings | 48 | 26 | 26 |
| Lectures, travelogues | 40 | 27 | 33 |
| Tours and outings | 25 | 38 | 36 |
| Bingo | 42 | 13 | 45 |
| Community singing | 20 | 34 | 47 |
| Cards | 20 | 30 | 50 |
| Potluck parties | 31 | 10 | 58 |
| Volunteer work | 8 | 11 | 80 |
| Bowling | 8 | 5 | 87 |
| Pool | 4 | 9 | 87 |
| Ceramics class | 9 | 2 | 88 |
| Dancing | 3 | 8 | 89 |
| Art | 4 | 6 | 90 |
| Crafts | 2 | 1 | 96 |

these forms of recreation, both sewing and knitting were included with non-group recreation. In their conversations with the respondents, the general impression gained by the interviewers was that these pursuits were predominantly personal rather than group in nature. Visiting outside of the apartment building, membership in clubs, and church activities were included under individual activities because they are not sponsored by the Housing Authority or by the Parks and Recreation Department. Participation in individual leisure time activities is summarized in the following table.

TABLE VII

Percent of Respondents Engaging in
Individual Recreational Activities

| <u>Activity</u> | <u>Often</u> | <u>Occasionally</u> | <u>Never</u> |
|---|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| TV | 69% | 26% | 5% |
| Reading | 53 | 35 | 11 |
| Radio | 60 | 26 | 13 |
| Walking | 54 | 30 | 16 |
| Letter-writing | 36 | 48 | 16 |
| Visiting outside of the apartment building | 31 | 50 | 18 |
| Sitting and thinking | 46 | 29 | 24 |
| Sewing | 16 | 29 | 56 |
| Clubs | 7 | 13 | 79 |
| Knitting | 12 | 7 | 81 |
| Church activities | 10 | 8 | 82 |
| Movies | 1 | 18 | 82 |
| Gardening | 4 | 5 | 90 |

When subjects were asked to mention any recreational pursuits in which they engaged in addition to those listed in question 12 of the interview schedule, the responses included the following:

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

Crocheting (16)*
 Embroidering (9)
 Visiting on the phone (5)
 Fishing (4)
 Listening to records (4)
 Cooking and baking (3)
 Riding in the car (4)
 Working crossword puzzles (3)
 Jig-saw puzzles (2)
 Caring for house plants (2)
 Shopping (3)
 Playing a musical instrument (2)
 Collecting salt and pepper shakers
 Keeping up a picture album
 Making home movies
 Working the newspaper jumble
 Writing poems
 Making centerpieces
 Going to wrestling matches
 Writing music
 Tatting
 Cleaning house
 Listening to talking books

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Visiting friends in the tower (2)
 Visiting sick people and helping
 people in the tower (2)
 Playing ball with grandchildren
 Praying the rosary in a group
 Organizing the pots and pans band

*The figure in parentheses gives the number of respondents who mentioned the activity. Those with no number were mentioned only once.

When the subjects were asked to indicate their three favorite leisure time pursuits, there were 337 responses. Of these, 29% were references to group activities connected with the apartment building, and 62% dealt with individual forms of recreation. The most frequently mentioned tower activities were bingo, birthday parties, pool, travelogues, card playing, ceramics, art, and bowling. Individual recreation most often referred to was television viewing followed closely by reading. Other pursuits which the respondents commonly spoke of were walking, knitting, sewing, embroidering and crocheting, listening to the radio, visiting, cooking and baking, gardening, fishing, and doing housework.

Most of those interviewed indicated that they are satisfied with the recreational programs available in the towers. The general attitude seems to be that the activities are varied and adequate. Residents feel free to take part in as many or as few as they desire. There were a few dissenting remarks such as: "Recreational activities are very minor for people our age" and "Why should we be entertained and why do people think we're different?" Several times respondents mentioned the presence of cliques in the towers which monopolized the recreation room or excluded others from their doings. Gossip and friction among residents were referred to occasionally. One of the residents noted: "We have a hard group of people here to please. They find fault with everything you do."

One area in which some concern was expressed was that of recreational activities for the men. There are fewer men than women living in the buildings and this poses a special problem. While the men are, of course, welcome to take part in any of the programs offered, most of these would appear to have more appeal for women than for men. Only two activities, bowling and pool, would seem to hold particular interest for the men.

A relatively large proportion (42%) of the subjects indicated that they spend most of their leisure time alone. This is consistent with the finding that individual activities such as television viewing and reading were mentioned more frequently as favorite leisure time pursuits than were social or group types of recreation.

Nearly 3/4 of this sample felt that it would be a disadvantage to have recreational activities available only outside the towers. Subjects frequently commented on the transportation problem which would be involved in going to another location such as a community center. There were also several persons who noted that physical disabilities and illness would make it difficult or impossible for some to attend functions outside of their apartment building. This finding is in accord with Ballweg's conclusion that "occupants were overwhelmingly in favor of having programs available within the building rather than at some other location in the city."¹¹ Eighty-nine percent of his sample considered recreational facilities in the apartment buildings an advantage.

From responses to the question, "What kinds of things would you do if you were in charge of leisure activities here?", it is possible to determine to some extent the feelings of the respondents regarding the types of activities now being offered in the towers.

While a majority of the respondents offered no suggestions, stating merely that the recreational activities are adequate and well organized as they stand, those who did make further comments were usually indicating a desire for more of the activities currently being offered or for additional

¹¹ John A. Ballweg, Senior Citizen Recreation: A Research Report (Omaha: University of Omaha, 1967), p. 15.

activities of a similar nature, rather than for a drastic change in type of activity. This finding is in support of Ballweg's finding in the summer of 1967.¹² There were several cases, however, in which the subjects expressed the feeling that there are too many things going on and that people should not be pestered into coming down to the activities. On the other hand, there were also a few respondents who felt that more effort should be made to encourage participation in activities provided at the towers.

Suggestions for recreational activities included the following:

- More bingo
- More lectures and discussions (perhaps on grammar and on banking and wills)
- More dancing
- More movies
- More community singing
- More parties
- More entertainment from outside (such as singing groups and square dancing groups)
- More tours and outings
- More card playing
- More craftwork

- A sewing group
- Regular religious services in the towers
- Wood-working or shop for the men
- Potluck suppers (not all of the towers have them)
- Chorus
- Entertainment following the tenant meetings
- Dramatics (skits and monologues by the residents)
- Exercises (calisthenics)
- Attendance at plays at the high schools in the city
- Ball diamond
- Horseshoe courts
- Croquet
- Bowling alley in the towers
- Book reviews
- Fishing
- Picnic benches and tables

¹²Ballweg, op. cit., p. 33.

Only a few respondents (9%) indicated that they would enjoy being in charge of some of the tower activities at which they excel. There is some evidence for the disengagement theory in this reluctance to function as a leader. As the individual becomes older he may tend to withdraw from social participation and from positions of responsibility. Temperament and the extent of involvement in leadership activities in earlier years no doubt exercise considerable influence on whether the person is willing to take on such positions now. Evidence also appears to point to the fact that physical disability and general slowing down processes have some bearing on the capacity as well as on the desire to function as a leader within a formally organized group.

Activities which subjects mentioned they would enjoy being in charge of included:

- Any social activities outside of money making events
- Birthday parties
- Crafts
- Music
- Program chairman
- Library holdings
- Bingo calling
- Pots and pans band
- Helper in the tenant organization

Respondents were asked to name any organized activities which they had dropped out of and their reasons for doing so. Fifty-four percent of the residents interviewed had never started any of the organized activities. About 1/2 of those who had started some organized programs had discontinued one or more.

Responses to this question yielded the following list of activities dropped and reasons for dropping them:

Art class (6)*--"Class was discontinued." "I didn't have sufficient talent." "The turpentine got to be too much."

Knitting class (4)--"The clique excluded me." "I got as much as I wanted out of it and then quit." "I had learned what I needed to know." "I couldn't catch on." "It was too strenuous."

Sewing group (4)--"The group was discontinued because only a few would do anything." "It fell through."

Bingo (3)--"I would just rather stay up here." "I was bored."

Ceramics (3)--"I don't like to play in mud. It was hard on my nerves." "My materials never came."

Leathercraft (3)--"It was too hard to learn." "I couldn't see well enough."

Community singing--"There was too much talking on the side and I couldn't sing."

Card playing--"Some wanted to have it their way."

President and floor captain--"I can't see."

Taking care of flowers--"I can't see now."

Tenant meetings--"Not very interesting or I was at work at the time."

Travelogues and outings--"Surroundings" (meaning tensions with other people the interviewer gathered.)

Bowling--"Arthritis".

Chorus--"It folded up."

Fire Marshall--"There was too much criticism."

*The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of respondents who said that they dropped the activity. The items without numbers were mentioned only once.

Inquiry into whether the respondents would want to sell some of the things which they make such as ceramic items, crocheted and knitted articles resulted in an even split between those who would consider selling things and those who would not. Nearly all of those who indicated that they make things said that they use the items they make for gifts. These gifts most frequently go to children and grandchildren.

Tours and outings sponsored by the Parks and Recreation Department were taken in by 64% of those interviewed at one time or another. Seventy-six out of these 86 persons rated the outings they had gone on as either enjoyable or very enjoyable. It could be that those persons with a more positive outlook on life would be those who would be more likely to go on the tours and also more inclined to find such outings enjoyable.

Only 16% of this sample knew for sure that their tower had a representative on the City-Wide Senior Citizens Council. Thirty-seven percent admitted when probed that they did not know what the Council was. The interviewers suspected that this proportion was even higher, but that this was not uncovered due to inadequate probing.

Prior to moving in, most of these subjects did not know about the recreational facilities available in the towers. One reason could be, and several respondents mentioned this, that most of the persons interviewed had moved in when the buildings were new and the recreational programs were just in the process of being formulated. Of the 16 persons who said that they did know about the recreational facilities before moving, five had heard about them from a friend or relative, five from Housing Authority personnel, three from the mass media, and two said they had known about the programs offered in other towers. Source of information for the other respondent was not ascertained.

Nearly 1/4 of the residents questioned stated that they felt residents should have more say-so in deciding what activities are offered in the towers. Forty-seven percent said that they did not think more voice was necessary. They were of the opinion that the building occupants have a good deal to say about determining the types of recreation and programs provided for them. A full 30% of this sample was uncertain about whether residents needed more voice in their tenant organization. There is a tenant organization in each tower which meets once a month to deal with matters concerning residents. At these meetings fund-raising activities for the tower such as bazaars and bake sales are planned and up-coming tours and outings are discussed to determine where the occupants would like to go. Other parties such as the monthly birthday parties are discussed and there are reports from courtesy committees and so forth. There appears to be much loyalty among the residents of each tower.

Life Satisfaction

The second part of the interview schedule was designed to tap attitudes and the satisfaction level of the older people who were the subjects of this study. The resulting data were analyzed in the light of the three theories of aging described in the first section of this report.

A. Retirement

Several questions on retirement indicated that expectations of what retirement years would hold for the respondents were often not realized. To begin with 36% of the sample said that they had looked forward to retirement while 42% had not, and 15% were either indifferent or had mixed feelings. The other 7% had never been employed or were women whose husbands

had passed away before retirement age. There appeared to be some difference between the sexes on anticipation of retirement, but this difference was not significant yielding a chi square value of 2.19 with a 5.991 required to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance. Table VIII shows the anticipation of retirement by both men and women.

TABLE VIII

Anticipation of Retirement by Sex

| <u>Sex</u> | <u>Looked forward to Retirement</u> | <u>Did not look forward to retirement</u> | <u>Indifferent (or mixed feelings)</u> | <u>Row Totals</u> |
|------------|---|---|--|-----------------------|
| Men | 10 | 19 | 6 | 35 |
| Women | <u>38</u> | <u>37</u> | <u>14</u> | <u>89</u> |
| TOTALS | 48 | 56 | 20 | 124* |

*Total does not equal 135 because this question was not applicable to all of the subjects.

$$\chi^2 = 2.2248$$

Respondents often expected more from their retirement years than was realized or fulfilled in the years following retirement. However, 38% said that they did not know what they had expected their retirement years to be like, the chief reason given being that they had never given it any thought. Only 7% had expected that they would be able to do fewer things that they enjoyed after leaving their job. Actually some 44% found that since retirement they have been able to do fewer things that they enjoy. This statement was often qualified by comments that the reason for this reduction in activity was poor health, loss of spouse or lowered financial status. Health was the most frequently cited reason for having been able to do fewer enjoyable things since leaving their jobs.

It was also discovered that men were less likely than women to have found that since retirement they have been able to do more things they enjoy. The difference here was significant at the .05 level of significance, based on the data given in Table IX.

TABLE IX

Enjoyment Following Retirement by Sex

| <u>Sex</u> | <u>Do more things that I enjoy</u> | <u>Do fewer things that I enjoy</u> | <u>Do the same number of things I enjoy as before retirement</u> | <u>Row Totals</u> |
|------------|--|---|--|-----------------------|
| Men | 5 | 22 | 7 | 34 |
| Women | <u>31</u> | <u>37</u> | <u>17</u> | <u>85</u> |
| TOTALS | 36 | 59 | 24 | 119* |

*This does not total 135 because not all of the respondents answered this question.

$$\chi^2 = 6.0787$$

When questioned out-right about how they would rate their retirement years, 3/4 of the sample referred to those years as satisfactory or very satisfactory even though 44% had said that since retiring they had been able to do fewer things that they enjoy. This could appear contradictory unless it could be hypothesized that expectations are lowered with the passing years, and that satisfaction becomes less dependent on doing things for enjoyment. There is another possibility which the interviewers gleaned from contact with the respondents. There was the suggestion that persons felt they might just as well be satisfied with things as they are because the situation cannot be altered anyway. It seemed that there was a note of fatalism in the "satisfaction" expressed by some of the subjects.

B. Main Purpose in Life

Some interesting data were generated by the question, "What do you think is the main purpose in life?" There was an even split between those who felt that the main purpose was to be as happy as possible and those who thought that the main purpose was to live according to religious ideals. Respondents often had some difficulty in choosing between these two alternatives. The interviewers felt that the structured responses to this question may have hampered the subjects' freedom to express themselves on life's purposes and goals. Table X summarizes the answers given.

TABLE X

Main Purpose in Life as Viewed by Respondents

| <u>Purpose</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| To be as happy as possible | 35 | 26% |
| To achieve as much as possible | 3 | 2 |
| To learn as much as possible | 16 | 12 |
| To live according to religious ideals | 35 | 26 |
| A combination of 2 or more of the above | 18 | 13 |
| Other | 18 | 13 |
| No answer or don't know | <u>10</u> | <u>7</u> |
| TOTALS | 135 | 99%* |

*Percents do not total 100 due to rounding.

Responses in the "other" category included statements such as these:

"To do for others and try to make them happy." Seven people gave answers such as this but evidently did not connect humanitarian efforts with living according to religious ideals which was one of the structured alternatives.

"To be free from discontent. To help people become more contented with the way we have to live."

"To be contented with what you have; take each day and make the best of it."

"Have to keep a balance between wanting and needing."

"To get the most out of life and to raise your children."

"To accomplish what the Lord put me here for."

"It's up to you to make your own life."

C. Self and Other Orientation

Three questions were included on the interview schedule which allowed the individuals to indicate what they felt to be the most important thing in their lives at present, the nicest thing that had happened in the past six months, and the best things about being their age.

In referring to the most important thing in their lives, 37% gave answers which the investigators categorized as representing other-orientation or "engagement" to employ Cumming and Henry's term. Answers in this category included references to family or friends. Self-oriented answers or those suggesting disengagement from social interaction were given by 47% of the subjects. Here references were frequently made to memories, to one's own health or to self, and often indicated general withdrawal from social contacts. Six percent of the sample answered that nothing was important to them and 10% did not know what was important or refused to answer the question. A few remarks which were elicited by this question were: "To be active. I don't want to get old and sit around and whine"; "To have faith in God and live a good Christian life"; "This war to get over and quit sending boys over to get shot"; "I just take it the way it comes. The check I get every month means the most."

Respondents had a difficult time naming the nicest thing that had happened in the past six months. Almost 30% said that they could not recall. Often the event mentioned was a visit from a relative, a new grandchild, the marriage or graduation of a relative, and other family-oriented answers. One of the women remarked, "Oh, dear. Everything is nice. That's hard to answer."

In response to "What are the best things about being the age you are now?", 33% gave answers which were classified as representing some sort of involvement. References to good health and an optimistic outlook on life were included here. Thirty percent of the remarks were indicative of non-involvement or a withdrawal from social contacts and interest in the world at large. Twenty-four percent of the respondents stated that they considered nothing to be the best about their age and 13% said that they did not know what the best things might be. The range of responses to this question is illustrated by the following remarks:

"There are so many pleasant things to remember and think about."

"The older you get the slower you get, and you kind of resent that."

"I don't think there's anything bad about being old."

"You don't have to get up in the morning and go to work and be under someone's thumb."

"Watching the grandchildren grow up."

"It's an awful lonely age."

Responses to all three of these questions would appear to lend some support to Cumming and Henry's disengagement theory of aging. There were many answers which pointed to decreased involvement and a general withdrawal from social interaction. With the emphasis on youth in this culture, it is

not surprising that these respondents found the prospect of growing old less than desirable and had difficulty pinpointing the satisfying aspects of their lives.

D. "Felt" Age and Desirable Age

Most of the respondents indicated that they feel their own age or younger, perhaps another tribute to the youth-centered nature of American culture. Table XI shows the distribution of answers to the question on "felt" age.

TABLE XI

"Felt" Age of Respondents

| <u>Age</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| My own age | 45 | 33% |
| Younger | 55 | 41 |
| Older | 13 | 10 |
| Varies | 9 | 7 |
| Don't know or no answer | <u>13</u> | <u>10</u> |
| TOTALS | 135 | 101%* |

*Percents total more than 100 due to rounding.

Table XII indicates the ages which subjects said that they would like to be. There is a good deal of realism displayed by the answers to this question. Indications were that persons in the sample were reluctant to appear fanciful or silly by saying that they would like to be young again.

E. Scales

In an attempt to tap information which would indicate support for one or more of the three theories of successful aging described earlier, four scales were employed to quantify the data and provide some means of

TABLE XII

Desired Age Expressed by Respondents

| <u>Age</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------|------------------|----------------|
| My own age | 45 | 33% |
| Below 20 | 12 | 9 |
| 20-29 | 13 | 10 |
| 30-39 | 16 | 12 |
| 40-49 | 8 | 6 |
| 50-59 | 17 | 13 |
| 60-69 | 8 | 6 |
| 70 or above | 2 | 1 |
| No answer | <u>14</u> | <u>10</u> |
| TOTALS | 135 | 100% |

determining whether there is any association between the variables of social participation, expressed happiness and disengagement.

1. A participation scale was devised in which a total score was given to each respondent based on the amount of participation in social activities in the tower. The scores were then dichotomized into high and low participation.

2. A measure of set or expressed satisfaction was composed of five questions dealing with satisfaction with retirement, how the respondent felt about what he had accomplished in life, how happy he was at present compared with earlier periods in life, and how often he found himself feeling lonely and bored. Once again the scores have been dichotomized into positive set and negative set.

3. A world view scale was employed which had been utilized by Cumming and Henry in their Kansas City Study of Adult Life. This scale was intended to provide some measure of the perspective which older people have on the world around them and on themselves and their social interaction. The scale consists of seven Kutner items and five Srole items. Cumming and Henry first

were of the opinion that their scale of Kutner and Srole items was measuring morale objectively. However, after some investigation in which they utilized a technique of intensive interviewing and then had the interviewers rank the individual according to morale, some of the respondents who had received a score indicating low morale actually were ranked by the interviewers as possessing good morale.¹³ The researchers decided that the items in the scale are "normative" meaning that the scores reflect the fact that the subjects may answer according to what they feel the interviewer wants to hear and what is right and proper to reveal.¹⁴ An individual's score on the scaled items is assumed then to reflect both a world view and an attitude toward the interviewer. This same assumption has been made in the present study. In general, the scale tends to elicit a cynical attitude about the nature of the world as opposed to any belief in its progress and goodness. Each score is an expression of the degree of the respondent's alienation from a belief in the "best of all possible worlds."¹⁵

4. A disengagement scale was devised using the three questions which asked about the most important thing in the respondent's life, the nicest thing that had happened in the last six months, and the best things about being one's age. Disengagement refers to a voluntary withdrawal from certain types of social interaction and from interest in the world at large.

¹³Cumming and Henry, op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 260.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 261.

F. Social Participation

Neugarten has noted that in the Kansas City studies it was found that overt or public patterns of social interaction begin to show marked changes only after age 65.¹⁶ Assuming that participation in leisure activities of a group nature would be one measure of overt social interaction, the present investigators cross tabulated age with their measure of participation in group forms of recreation. A significant drop in the amount of participation among the respondents occurred only after age 75 as the following table indicates.

TABLE XIII

Amount of Participation in Group
Activities by Age

| <u>Age</u> | <u>High part- icipation</u> | <u>Low part- icipation</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>High part- icipation</u> | <u>Low part- icipation</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Below 70 | 28 | 24 | 52 | Below 75 | 56 | 28 | 85 |
| Above 70 | <u>53</u> | <u>30</u> | <u>83</u> | Above 75 | <u>25</u> | <u>26</u> | <u>51</u> |
| Total | 81 | 54 | 135 | Total | 81 | 54 | 135 |
| $x^2 = 1.3345$ | | | | $x^2 = 4.1111$ | | | |

This finding indicates that perhaps the slowing down process is not as rapid as is commonly believed. There could be some support here for the activity theory of successful aging provided it could be shown that active

¹⁶Bernice L. Neugarten, "Personality and the Aging Process," in Processes of Aging, ed. by Richard H. Williams, Clark Tibbitts, and Willa Donahue, Vol. I (New York: Atherton Press, 1963), p. 323.

people over 75 were more happy than inactive people over 75. Further investigation would be necessary to determine whether people who are over 75 and who do not engage in group leisure time activities are actually unsuccessful in the aging process. It is possible that the general slowing down of physical processes forces a curtailment of activity after age 75, but that this does not necessarily preclude happiness and satisfaction in these later years. If expressed satisfaction, which simply means that the respondent says that he is happy and satisfied with his life, is taken as an indicator of successful aging as Havighurst maintains, the present study lends some evidence to this theory as will be shown later.

G. Expressed Satisfaction

Scores for the measure of expressed satisfaction or set could range from 5 to 25 with 5 being an expression of greatest satisfaction or the most positive set. The mean for the entire sample was 11.3 with a standard deviation of 3.6. When the scores were dichotomized 5-12 was viewed as positive and 13-25 as negative set. Eighty-eight (65%) respondents scored positively and 47 (35%) negatively.

Those respondents who stated that their retirement years have been satisfactory, that they are happy and seldom lonely or bored were more likely to participate in activities of a social nature. Table 14 summarizes this finding.

There appears to be strong indication in this and other findings in the present study that the theories of aging are not separate but are interdependent. Expressed satisfaction and amount of social participation are closely linked for the respondents. Those persons who say that they are happy are in fact the ones who also enjoy engaging in recreational activities

TABLE XIV

Expressed Satisfaction (Set) and Social Participation

| | <u>High Participation</u> | <u>Low Participation</u> | <u>Totals</u> |
|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Positive set | 61 | 25 | 86 |
| Negative set | <u>26</u> | <u>23</u> | <u>49</u> |
| TOTALS | 87 | 48 | 135 |

$x^2 = 4.35$ This represents a significant difference at the .05 level. A value of 3.84 or greater is necessary to reject the null hypothesis at this level.

of a group nature. Further investigation would be necessary in order to determine in which direction the relationship runs or whether it is reversible.

Neither age nor sex was found to be significantly related to positive or negative set in this investigation. Havighurst found that age made little difference in personal adjustment. Very old people have as good a chance of being happy and well adjusted as do younger (age 65) people.¹⁷ Havighurst and Albrecht used the terms happiness and good adjustment interchangeably although the terms do not mean exactly the same thing. The researchers justified this use of concepts because of the fact that the "personal adjustment of older people depends largely upon their present happiness, much more than it does for younger people."¹⁸ Havighurst also discovered the "felt" age was more closely related to adjustment and happiness than was actual age. However, this finding was not supported in the present

¹⁷Robert J. Havighurst and Ruth Albrecht, Older People (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953).

¹⁸Ibid., p. 52.

study. When "felt" age and set were subjected to a chi square test, a higher chi square value was obtained than when actual age was correlated with set, but neither value indicated a significant difference.

H. World View

Cumming and Henry consider "world view" to be an ideological variable which can be interpreted as a distinction between conformity and alienation.¹⁹ A particular score on the world view scale indicates the degree of conformity to as opposed to alienation from the dominant values of American culture with an overtone of personal optimism or pessimism. Cumming and Henry view the ideology underlying the items as being unidimensional since the items themselves can be scaled by the Guttman technique. However, in the present study the items were not subjected to scaling technique since time and facilities contraindicated such a procedure.

Scores on the World View Scale employed in this survey could range from 12-36 with 12 being the most optimistic view. The lowest score for members of this sample was 14. The mean score was 26.6 and the standard deviation was 4.9. Scores were dichotomized into positive or optimistic world view and pessimistic or negative world view. Fourteen through twenty-six was classified as positive and 27-36 as negative. Seventy-three (54%) persons scored in the positive range and 62 (46%) in the negative range. Table 15 shows the distribution of world view scores for the entire sample.

It was hypothesized that those 75 and over would subscribe to a more pessimistic world view than would the younger subjects. This hypothesis was

¹⁹Cumming and Henry, op. cit., p. 94.

TABLE XV

Distribution of Scores on World View Scale

| <u>Score</u> | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| 14 | 1 | 1% |
| 16 | 3 | 2 |
| 18 | 5 | 4 |
| 20 | 10 | 7 |
| 22 | 10 | 7 |
| 24 | 17 | 13 |
| 26 | 27 | 20 |
| 28 | 21 | 16 |
| 29 | 1 | 1 |
| 30 | 13 | 10 |
| 32 | 13 | 10 |
| 34 | 8 | 6 |
| 36 | 6 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 135 | 101%* |

*Percents total more than 100 due to rounding.

grounded in the statement by Cumming and Henry that "conformity to the dominant world view of optimism and orientation toward the future, as measured by our alienation score, does not start to disappear until after the 75th year."²⁰ One reason which Cumming and Henry suggested for the lack of conformity after age 75 was the possibility that as people grow older they feel less compulsion to give normative responses and to do the expected thing. The foregoing hypothesis was not borne out in the present investigation as can be detected from Table 16. Age of the respondents in this sample did not appear to influence their outlook on the world.

A second hypothesis regarding world view was that those who participate in more tower (social) activities would also subscribe to a more optimistic world view. It was indeed found that for this sample those who view the world

²⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

TABLE XVI

World View by Age

| <u>Age</u> | <u>Positive World View</u> | <u>Negative World View</u> | <u>Totals</u> |
|------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Below 75 | 47 | 37 | 84 |
| Above 75 | <u>26</u> | <u>25</u> | <u>51</u> |
| TOTALS | 73 | 62 | 135 |

$$\chi^2 = 0.3159$$

with optimism tend to be more engaged and become involved in more recreational activities of a group nature. The world view scores and the participation scores previously discussed were subjected to a chi square test. Results are given in Table 17.

TABLE XVII

World View and Social Participation

| | <u>Positive World View</u> | <u>Negative World View</u> | <u>Totals</u> |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Low Participation | 20 | 29 | 49 |
| High Participation | <u>53</u> | <u>33</u> | <u>86</u> |
| TOTALS | 73 | 62 | 135 |

$$\chi^2 = 5.4440 \quad \text{This represents a significant difference.}$$

Suggestion of a relationship between degree of participation in leisure time pursuits involving other people and an optimistic view of one's world provides additional evidence for the activity theory of successful aging. Once again it is not possible from this data to determine whether an optimistic world view leads to continued involvement in social activity or whether it is prolonged social participation which results in an optimistic view of the world and its direction of change.

A final hypothesis was that persons with an optimistic world view would also have a more positive set, that is, they would express satisfaction and happiness. This hypothesis is given some support by the data of this study. Table 18 gives the distribution of persons in the sample who scored positively and negatively on "set" and on world view.

TABLE XVIII

World View and Expressed Satisfaction or "Set"

| | <u>Positive World View</u> | <u>Negative World View</u> | <u>Totals</u> |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Positive Set | 55 | 26 | 81 |
| Negative Set | <u>13</u> | <u>41</u> | <u>54</u> |
| TOTALS | 68 | 67 | 135 |

$$\chi^2 = 24.8952$$

Data in Table 18 yield a Yule's Q value of .74 which is indicative of a strong relationship between the two variables. Such a strong statistical relationship could possibly result from the fact that both set or expressed satisfaction and world view scores were derived from respondents' answers to items which were attitudinal in nature. Hence, the items were less concrete than those which dealt with such things as the number of times the respondent took part in various recreational activities on which the participation scale was based. Attitudes tend to be consistent within individuals.

On the basis of this limited data, there appears to be a close relationship between how happy or satisfied an individual says he is and how he looks upon his environment or the world around him.

I. Disengagement

Scores on the engagement scale ranged from 3 to 9. Lower scores indicated that the individual was involved with other people and with the world around him, while higher scores suggested that the respondent had withdrawn from social contacts and did not display interest in his surroundings. Mean score for the entire sample was 5.8. Scores of 3-6 were classified as indicating engagement, and scores of 7-9 were labeled as suggesting disengagement. Ninety-two (68%) persons were categorized as engaged and 43 (32%) as disengaged.

Respondents who were highly engaged also had a more positive world view. The chi square value was significant as Table 19 shows. However, no

TABLE XIX

Engagement and World View

| | <u>Positive World View</u> | <u>Negative World View</u> | <u>Totals</u> |
|------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Engaged | 56 | 36 | 92 |
| Disengaged | <u>17</u> | <u>26</u> | <u>43</u> |
| TOTALS | 73 | 62 | 135 |

$$\chi^2 = 5.3710$$

significant difference was found between persons who were engaged or disengaged with regard to their set or expressed satisfaction which was equated with happiness in this study. Persons who were disengaged were as likely to say that they were happy as those who were involved and had continued their social contacts during the aging process. See Table 20.

TABLE XX

Engagement and Expressed Satisfaction (Set)

| | <u>Positive Set</u> | <u>Negative Set</u> | <u>Totals</u> |
|------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Engaged | 64 | 28 | 92 |
| Disengaged | <u>24</u> | <u>19</u> | <u>43</u> |
| TOTALS | 88 | 47 | 135 |

$$\chi^2 = 2.4418$$

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A random sample of the residents of five Public Housing Authority apartment buildings for the elderly were interviewed to determine the amount of social participation, the level of life satisfaction and the relationship between the two among elderly persons.

Respondents generally indicated that they felt that the recreational programs in the towers were adequate and well organized. Those who participated in them found them enjoyable. The more specialized programs such as the ceramics and art classes attracted fewer persons than did activities such as monthly birthday parties and bus tours and outings. Individual or personal leisure time pursuits were mentioned more often than group recreational activities. Television viewing was the recreation engaged in most frequently by the tower residents.

Age of the respondents was found to have some bearing on the amount of participation in group recreational activities, those over 75 taking part in fewer social events. This is probably due at least partially to general decline in physical capabilities. Voluntary disengagement may also be somewhat responsible for lessened activity. Age did not seem to have any influence on whether the subjects said that they were happy and satisfied or on whether they held to a pessimistic or optimistic view of the world. Here it must be remembered that nearly all the members of this sample were 60 or over so that there was no basis for comparison with younger individuals. Comparisons in this study were made between those below 75 and those above 75.

Life satisfaction among the members of the sample could probably be equated with the concept of successful aging. Some support was found for

all three of the prominent theories of successful aging: the activity theory, the disengagement theory and the inner satisfaction theory. The present investigators concluded that inner satisfaction is probably the major criterion of successful aging. However, there are difficulties involved in tapping inner feelings of contentment and happiness by means of an interview schedule. In this study, the direct method was employed which consisted of asking the respondents whether they were satisfied with various aspects of their lives, plus questions designed to determine their perception of the state of the world and their conformity to or alienation from the dominant values of American culture. One drawback in this regard is that there is no control for the possibility that individuals do not express their true feelings when questioned by strangers or even when questioned by persons whom they know and trust. Defenses and normative answers aimed at guaranteeing social acceptance are common. A measure of inner satisfaction should be devised which gets around such mechanisms aimed at saving face and defending the ego.

Successful aging is not a unidimensional concept based on one factor such as maintenance of the activities of middle age or the voluntary disengagement from social interaction. Aging successfully is a multidimensional process which, in order to be defined and studied, requires that many aspects of the individual's past and present life experiences, attitudes, and social environment be investigated.

Persons in this survey who said that they were happy and seldom lonely or bored were found to be more inclined to take part in the group recreational programs within the apartment buildings. Likewise the individuals who viewed the world with optimism and conformed to the dominant values of American culture took part in more of the social activities than did others. The subjects'

outlook on the world and their satisfaction with retirement and with what they had accomplished (expressed satisfaction or set) seemed to be closely linked. There was no discernible difference between those members of the sample classified as disengaged and those classified as engaged with regard to their expression of satisfaction, contentment, or happiness.

From data gathered in this investigation then, it appears that the theories of successful aging currently popular are not separate and opposed but interdependent. On the one hand, inner happiness or life satisfaction is related to activity and social participation for some older people, while on the other, disengagement or withdrawal from social interaction for some older people does not preclude an expression of inner contentment and satisfaction.

With the exception of the world view scale the measures employed in this survey were devised by the present investigators and are not refined. It is also recognized that final conclusions cannot be drawn from the results of chi square tests alone since an indication of a significant difference is not proof of high correlation between variables but only suggests the direction in which investigation should proceed.

Due to the fact that the subjects of this study were residents of low-rent public housing apartments the findings are not applicable to elderly people in general without further investigation involving a more varied population.

Appreciation is extended to Mr. Jerry Parks of the Parks and Recreation Department and to Mr. Charles Denton and Mrs. O'Malley of the Public Housing Authority for their cooperation in this study. Special thanks are due to Dr. George Barger of the Sociology Department, University of Nebraska at Omaha, for his supervision and assistance in all phases of the project.

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following pages are a reproduction of the interview schedule in the form used in this study. Percentage of the total sample giving each answer to each of the closed questions is shown.

On the final page of the schedule is a world view scale in which there are three possible answers. The neutral or middle answer was coded with the negative or pessimistic answer. As a result, only two percentages are given.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

Urban Studies Center
Survey of Social Participation
of Senior Citizens

NUMBERS INDICATE THE PERCENTAGE
OF TOTAL RESPONSES TO CLOSED
QUESTIONS.

BUILDING:

22 Kay-Jay Tower (1)
22 Park Tower South (2)
19 Park Tower North (3)
21 Burt Tower (4)
16 Evans Tower (5)

RESPONDENT LIVES:

78 alone (1)
16 with spouse (2)
1 with child (3)
4 other (specify) (4)

SEX OF RESPONDENT:

27 male (1)
73 female (2)

RACE OF RESPONDENT:

93 white (1)
7 non-white (2)

MARITAL STATUS:

10 single (1)
18 married (2)
59 widowed (3)
13 divorced or separated (4)

BIRTHDATE:

LAST SCHOOL YEAR COMPLETED:

RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE:

Interviewer's name _____

Date of interview _____

Apartment number _____

REASONS FOR NONCOMPLETION:

____ not at home (1)
____ ill (2)
____ refused (3)
____ deceased (4)
____ moved (5)
____ other (specify) (6)

1. For your age do you consider yourself to be in:

16 excellent health (1)
31 good health (2)
37 fair health (3)
15 poor health (4)

2. How many times in the last month have you been to the doctor? _____

3. Do you attend church services? 65 yes(1) 35 no(2)

If yes, how often?

38 once a week or more (1)
17 once or twice a month (2)
10 less than once a month (3)

4. Are you working now? 8 yes (1) 91 no (2)

4a. If yes, what do you do specifically? _____

4b. If no, what kind of work did you do? _____

5. Were/are you required to retire at a certain age?

17 yes (1)
71 no (2)

6. When did you move here? _____

7. Where did you first hear about these apartments?

8. Why did you decide to move here?

9. Are you generally satisfied with your living quarters here?

65 very satisfied (1)
31 satisfied (2)
2 don't know (3)
2 dissatisfied (4)
 very dissatisfied (5)

10. What kind of living quarters did you have before you moved here?

24 house (1)
63 apartment (2)
1 home for the aged (3)
 hospital (4)
13 other(specify) (5)

11. Who did you live with then?

55 alone (1)
25 spouse (2)
8 children (3)
4 sister or brother (4)
3 other relative (5)
2 friend or non-relative (6)
2 more than one of the above (7)

12. Which of these activities do you take part in?

| Activity | Never | Occasionally | Often | Alone/ With others |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Playing pool | <u>87</u> | <u>9</u> | <u>4</u> | <u> </u> |
| Dancing | <u>89</u> | <u>8</u> | <u>3</u> | <u> </u> |
| Watching TV | <u>5</u> | <u>26</u> | <u>69</u> | <u> </u> |
| Playing cards | <u>50</u> | <u>30</u> | <u>20</u> | <u> </u> |
| Community singing | <u>47</u> | <u>34</u> | <u>20</u> | <u> </u> |
| Sewing | <u>56</u> | <u>29</u> | <u>16</u> | <u> </u> |
| Movies | | | | |
| public | <u>82</u> | <u>18</u> | <u>1</u> | <u> </u> |
| in tower | <u> </u> | <u> </u> | <u> </u> | <u> </u> |
| Letter-writing | <u>16</u> | <u>48</u> | <u>36</u> | <u> </u> |
| Tenant meetings | <u>26</u> | <u>26</u> | <u>48</u> | <u> </u> |
| Knitting | <u>81</u> | <u>7</u> | <u>12</u> | <u> </u> |
| Bowling | <u>87</u> | <u>5</u> | <u>8</u> | <u> </u> |
| Playing bingo | <u>45</u> | <u>13</u> | <u>42</u> | <u> </u> |
| Listening to radio | <u>13</u> | <u>26</u> | <u>61</u> | <u> </u> |
| Visiting outside tower | <u>19</u> | <u>50</u> | <u>31</u> | <u> </u> |

| | Never | Occasionally | Often | Alone/ with others |
|---|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Crafts (leather, etc.) | <u>96</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>2</u> | <u> </u> |
| Ceramics class | <u>88</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>9</u> | <u> </u> |
| Art | <u>90</u> | <u>6</u> | <u>4</u> | <u> </u> |
| Volunteer work | <u>80</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>8</u> | <u> </u> |
| Reading | <u>11</u> | <u>35</u> | <u>53</u> | <u> </u> |
| Sitting and thinking (Where? <u> </u>) | <u>24</u> | <u>29</u> | <u>46</u> | <u> </u> |
| Birthday parties (tower) | <u>18</u> | <u>20</u> | <u>61</u> | <u> </u> |
| Fund-raising activities | <u>22</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>67</u> | <u> </u> |
| Pot luck parties in tower | <u>58</u> | <u>10</u> | <u>31</u> | <u> </u> |
| Church activities (Ladies' Aid mtgs., etc.) | <u>82</u> | <u>8</u> | <u>10</u> | <u> </u> |
| Lectures, travelogues | <u>33</u> | <u>27</u> | <u>40</u> | <u> </u> |
| Clubs outside tower (lodges, etc.) | <u>78</u> | <u>13</u> | <u>7</u> | <u> </u> |
| Gardening | <u>90</u> | <u>5</u> | <u>4</u> | <u> </u> |
| Tours or outings (Florence Center, wrestling, races) | <u>36</u> | <u>38</u> | <u>25</u> | <u> </u> |
| Taking walks | <u>16</u> | <u>30</u> | <u>54</u> | <u> </u> |
| Other (specify) | | | | <u> </u> |

13. Which three of the above do you like to do best?

14. Are most of your leisure time activities done:

| | |
|-----------|-------------------|
| <u>42</u> | alone (1) |
| <u>10</u> | with spouse (2) |
| <u>9</u> | with a friend (3) |
| <u>22</u> | in a group (4) |
| <u>17</u> | some of each (5) |

15. I am interested in how you spend your day. Take a typical day (yesterday, perhaps) and tell me your activities.

MORNING:

AFTERNOON:

EVENING:

16. What did you do for recreation before you moved here?

17. What kinds of things would you do if you were in charge of leisure activities here?

18. If all organized activities were only available outside the towers would you consider this:

7 an advantage (1)
72 a disadvantage (2)
19 don't know (3)

19. Would you enjoy being in charge of some of the tower activities you like to do best?

9 yes (1)
84 no (2)
5 don't know (3)

19a. Which ones?

20. Which of the following volunteer activities do you prefer to take part in?

4 making pads for Cancer Society (1)
4 telephone soliciting of blood donors for Red Cross (2)
2 March of Dimes (3)
90 none (4)

21. What would you think about selling some of the things you make? (e.g. ceramics, leathercraft, knitting, sewing)

22. Do you ever use the things you make for gifts?

33 yes (1)
4 no (2)
62 not applicable (3)

23. Have you gone on any of the tours arranged for tower residents?

64 yes (1)
35 no (2)

23a. If so, how would you rate them?

31 very enjoyable (1)
25 enjoyable (2)
2 don't know (3)
4 of little interest (4)
2 of no interest (5)
35 not applicable (6)

24. Do you happen to know if your tower has a representative on the City-Wide Senior Citizens Council?

16 yes (1)
6 no (2)
40 don't know (3)
37 don't know what council is (4)

25. Before moving into the tower did you know about its recreational activities?

12 yes (1)
87 no (2)

25a. If so, how did you find out?

26. Have you dropped out of some of the organized activities you started?

23 yes (1)
22 no (2)
54 never started (3)

26a. Which activities did you drop?

26b. Why did you drop them?

6 too strenuous (1)
0 didn't like instructor (2)
0 classes lasted too many weeks or months (3)
0 too many activities to choose from (4)
17 other (specify) (5)

77 not applicable (6)

27. Do you feel that residents should have more say-so in deciding what activities are offered in the towers?

22 yes (1)
47 no (2)
30 don't know (3)

28. Now I want to ask some questions about your feelings toward retirement. (ask only of retired persons or spouses)

Did you look forward to your (your spouse's) retirement?

36 yes (1)
42 no (2)
15 indifferent or mixed feelings (3)

28a. Did you think you could do more or fewer things you enjoy after retirement?

38 more (1)
7 fewer (2)
10 same (3)
38 don't know (4)

28b. Have you been able to do more or fewer of the things you enjoy since retirement?

27 more (1)
44 fewer (2)
18 same (3)
4 don't know (4)

28c. Would you like to do more of the things you enjoy than you do now?

49 yes (1)
41 no (2)
4 indifferent (3)

28d. How would you rate your retirement years?

21 very satisfactory (1)
53 satisfactory (2)
4 don't know (3)
9 disappointing (4)
5 very disappointing (5)

29. Did you subscribe to a newspaper before you moved to the tower?

82 yes (1)
19 no (2)

29a. Do you read a newspaper regularly now?

82 yes (1)
18 no (2)

30. Did you have a TV or radio where you lived before?

96 yes (1)
4 no (2)

30a. Do you regularly listen to the news on the radio or watch it on TV now?

93 yes (1)
6 no (2)

31. Which of the following apply to you? Do you:

57 see your children at least once a month (1)
40 see other relatives at least once a month (2)
59 have many very close friends (3)
85 have new friends since moving to the tower (4)
15 no relatives (5)

32. What do you think is the main purpose in life?

26 to be as happy as possible (1)
2 to achieve as much as possible (2)
12 to learn as much as possible (3)
26 to live according to religious ideals (4)
13 other (specify)

33. How do you feel about what you have accomplished in life?

21 very satisfied (1)
58 satisfied (2)
10 don't know (3)
9 dissatisfied (4)
2 very dissatisfied (5)

34. Compared with earlier periods in your life, how happy would you say you are right now?

8 much happier (1)
12 happier (2)
44 about the same (3)
28 less happy (4)
7 much less happy (5)

35. How often do you find yourself feeling lonely?

10 very often (1)
15 often (2)
4 don't know (3)
38 seldom (4)
33 very seldom (5)

36. How often do you find yourself feeling bored?

4 very often (1)
7 often (2)
4 don't know (3)
35 seldom (4)
49 very seldom (5)

37. Most people have/had a certain amount of unhappiness in marriage. If you were to rate your marriage as to happiness would you rate it:

14 much more happy than most (1)
16 more happy than most (2)
40 about the same (3)
7 less happy than most (4)
6 much less happy than most (5)

38. What is the most important thing in your life right now?

39. What is the nicest thing that has happened in the last 6 months?

40. What are the best things about being the age you are now?

41. How old do you feel? _____ 42. What age would you like to be? _____